

SPEECH FOR THE UNION,

BY

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DELIVERED AT MILLEDGEVILLE, GEORGIA,

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# S P E E C H .

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FELLOW CITIZENS.—I appear before you to night, at the request of members of the Legislature and others, to speak of matters of the deepest interest that can possibly concern us all of an earthly character. There is nothing—no question or subject connected with this life—that concerns a free people so intimately, as that of the government under which they live. We are now, indeed, surrounded by evils. Never since I entered upon the public stage, has the country been so environed with difficulties and dangers that threatened the public peace and the very existence of society as now. I do not now appear before you at my own instance. Had I consulted my own ease and pleasure, I should not be before you ; but, believing that it is the duty of every good citizen to give counsels and views whenever the country is in danger, as to the best policy to be pursued, I am here.

I wish to address myself to your good sense, to your good judgment, and if, after hearing, you disagree, let us agree to disagree, and part as we met, friends. We all have the same object, the same interest. That people should disagree in republican governments, upon questions of public policy is natural. That men should disagree upon all matters connected with human investigation, whether relating to science or human conduct, is natural. Hence, in free governments, parties will arise. But a free people should express their different opinions with liberality and charity, with no acrimony toward those of their fellows, when honestly and sincerely given. These are my feelings to night. Let us, therefore, reason together. Fellow citizens, we are all launched in the same bark ; we are all in the same craft in the wide political ocean—the same destiny awaits us all for weal or for woe. We have been launched in the good old ship that has been upon the waves for three-quarters of a century, which has been in many tempests and storms, has many times been in peril, and patriots have often feared that they should have to give it up, yea, had at times almost given it up, but still the gallant ship is afloat, though new storms now howl around us, and the tempest beats heavily against us. I say to you don't give up the ship, don't abandon her yet. If she can possibly be preserved, and our rights, interests and security be maintained, the object is worth the effort. Let us not on account of disappointment and chagrin at the reverse of an election, give up all as lost, but let us see what can be done to prevent a wreck. (Some one said the ship has holes in her.) And there may be leaks in her, but let us stop them if we can. Many a stout old ship has been saved with richest cargo, after many leaks, and it may be so now. (Cheers.) I do not, on this occasion, intend to enter into the history of the reasons or causes of the embarrassment which press so heavily upon us all at this time. In justice to myself, however, I must barely state upon this point, that I do think much of it depended upon ourselves. The consternation that has come upon the people, is the result of a sectional election of a President of the United States—one, whose opinions and avowed principles are in antagonism to our interests and rights, and we believe, if carried out, would subvert the constitution under which we now live. But are we entirely blameless in this matter, my countrymen? I give it to you as my opinion, that but for the policy the Southern people pursued, this fearful result would not have occurred. Mr. Lincoln has been elected, I doubt not, by a minority of the people of the United States. What will be the extent of that minority we do not yet know, but the disclosure, when made, will show, I think, that a majority of the constitutional, conservative voters of the country were against him ; and had the South stood firmly in the Convention at Charleston, on her old platform of principles of non-intervention, there is in my mind but little doubt that whoever might have been the candidate of the national democratic party would have been elected by as large a majority as that which elected Mr. Buchanan or Mr. Pierce. Therefore, let us not be hasty or rash in our action, especially if the result be attributable at all to ourselves. Before looking to extreme measures, let us first see, as Georgians, that everything which can be done to preserve our rights, our interests, and our honor, as well as the peace of the country in the Union, be first done. (Applause.) The first question that presents itself is, shall the people of the South secede from the Union in consequence of the election of Mr. Lincoln to the Presidency of the United States? My countrymen, I tell you frankly, candidly and earnestly that I do not think that they ought. In my judgment, the election of no man, constitutionally chosen to that high office, is sufficient cause for any State to separate from the Union. It ought to stand by and aid still in maintaining the constitution of the country. To make a point of resistance to the government—to withdraw from it because a

man has been constitutionally elected—*puts us in the wrong*. We are pledged to maintain the constitution. Many of us have sworn to support it. Can we, therefore, for the mere election of a man to the Presidency, and that too in accordance with the prescribed forms of the constitution, make a point of resistance to the government without becoming the breakers of that sacred instrument ourselves? Withdraw ourselves from it—would we not be in the wrong? Whatever fate is to befall this country, let it never be laid to the charge of the people of the South, and especially to the people of Georgia, that we were untrue to our national engagements. Let the fault and the wrong rest upon others. If all our hopes are to be blasted, if the republic is to go down, let us be found, to the last moment, standing on the deck with the constitution of the United States waving over our heads. (Applause.) Let the fanatics of the North break the constitution, if such is their fell purpose. Let the responsibility be upon them. I shall speak presently more of their acts; but let not the South, let us not be the ones to commit the aggression. We went into the election with this people. The result was different from what we wished; but the election has been constitutionally held. Were we to make a point of resistance to the government and go out of the Union on that account, the record would be made up hereafter against us. That it is said Mr. Lincoln's policy and principles are against the constitution, and that if he carries them out it will be destructive of our rights. Let us not anticipate a threatened evil. If he violates the constitution, then will come our time to act. *Do not let us break it, because, forsooth, he may*. If he does, that is the time for us to strike. (Applause.) I think it would be injudicious and unwise to do this sooner. I do not anticipate that Mr. Lincoln will do anything to jeopard our safety or security, whatever may be his spirit to do it; for he is bound by the constitutional checks which are thrown around him, which at this time renders him powerless to do any great mischief. This shows the wisdom of our system. The President of the United States is no Emperor, no Dictator—he is clothed with no absolute power. He can do nothing unless he is backed by power in Congress. The House of Representatives is largely in the majority against him. In the very face and teeth of the heavy majority which he has obtained in the Northern States, there have been large gains in the House of Representatives to the conservative constitutional party of the country, which here I will call the national democratic party, because that is the cognomen it has at the North. There are twelve of this party elected from New York to the next Congress, I believe. In the present House there are but four, I think. In Pennsylvania, New Jersey, Ohio and Indiana, there have been gains. In the present Congress there were 119 republicans, when it takes 117 to make a majority. The gains in the democratic party in Pennsylvania, Ohio, New Jersey, New York, Indiana and other States, notwithstanding its distractions, have been enough to make a majority of near thirty in the next House against Mr. Lincoln. Even in Boston Mr. Burlingame, one of the noted leaders of the fanatics of that section, has been defeated, and a conservative man returned in his stead. Is this the time then to apprehend that Mr. Lincoln, with this large majority in the House of Representatives against him, can carry out any of his unconstitutional principles in that body? In the Senate he will also be powerless. There will be a majority of four against him. This, after the loss of Bigler, Fitch and others, by the unfortunate disensions of the national democratic party in their States. Mr. Lincoln cannot appoint an officer without the consent of the Senate—he cannot form a Cabinet without the same consent. He will be in the condition of George the Third (the embodiment of toriyism,) who had to ask the whigs to appoint his ministers, and was compelled to receive a Cabinet utterly opposed to his views: and so Mr. Lincoln will be compelled to ask the Senate to choose for him a Cabinet, if the democracy of that body choose to put him on such terms. He will be compelled to do this or let the government stop, if the national democratic men—for that is their name at the North—the conservative men in the Senate, should so determine. Then how can Mr. Lincoln obtain a Cabinet which would aid him, or allow him to violate the constitution? Why then, I say, should we disrupt the ties of this Union when his hands are tied—when he can do nothing against us? I have heard it mooted that no man in the State of Georgia who is true to her interests, could hold office under Mr. Lincoln. But I ask who appoints to office? Not the President alone; the Senate has to concur. No man can be appointed without the consent of the Senate. Should any man then refuse to hold office that was given him by a democratic Senate?

Mr. TOOMBS interrupted, and said if the Senate was democratic it was for Mr. Breckinridge.

Mr. STEPHENS—Well, then, I apprehend no man could be justly considered untrue to the interests of Georgia or incur any disgrace, if the interests of Georgia required it, to hold an office under which a Breckinridge Senate had given him, even though Mr. Lincoln should be President. (Prolonged applause, mingled with interruptions.) I trust, my countrymen, you will be still and silent. I am addressing your good sense. In my judgment, I say, under such circumstances, there would be no possible disgrace for a Southern man to hold office. No man will be suffered to be appointed, I have no doubt, who is not true to the constitution, if Southern Senators are true to their trusts, as I cannot permit myself to doubt that they will be. My honorable friend who addressed you last night (Mr. Toombs,) and to whom I listened with the profoundest attention,

asks if we would submit to black republican rule? I say to you and to him, as a Georgian, I never would submit to any black republican aggression upon our constitutional rights. I will never consent myself, as much as I admire this Union for the glories of the past or the blessings of the present—as much as it has done for the people of all these States—as much as it has done for civilization—as much as the hopes of the world hang upon it—I would never submit to aggression upon my rights to maintain it longer; and if they cannot be maintained in the Union, standing on the Georgia platform, where I have stood from the time of its adoption, I would be in favor of disrupting every tie which binds these States together. I will have equality for Georgia and for the citizens of Georgia in this Union, or I will look for new safeguards elsewhere. This is my position. The only question now is, can they be secured in the Union? That is what I am counselling with you to-night about. Can it be secured? In my judgment it may be, but it may not be; but let us do all we can, so that in the future, if the worst come, it may never be said we were negligent in doing our duty to the last. My countrymen, I am not one of those who believe this Union has been a curse up to this time. True men, men of integrity, entertain different views from me on this subject. I do not question their right to do so; I would not impugn their motives in so doing. Nor will I undertake to say that this government of our fathers is perfect. There is nothing perfect in this world of a human origin. Nothing connected with human nature from man himself to any of his works. You may select the wisest and best men for your Judges, and yet how many defects are there in the administration of justice? You may select the wisest and best men for your legislators, and yet how many defects are apparent in your laws? And it is so in our government. But that this government of our fathers, with all its defects, comes nearer the objects of all good governments than any other on the face of the earth, is my settled conviction. Contrast it now with any on the face of the earth. (England, said Mr. Toombs.) Mr. Stephens—England, my friend says. Well, that is the next best I grant; but I think we have improved upon England. Statesmen tried their apprentice hand on the government of England, and then ours was made. Ours sprung from that, avoiding many of its defects, taking most of the good and leaving out many of its errors, and from the whole constructing and building up this model republic—the best which the history of the world gives any account of. Compare, my friends, this government with that of Spain, Mexico, the South American republics, Germany, Ireland. Are there any sons of that down trodden nation here to-night?—Prussia, or if you travel further east, to Turkey or China. Where will you go, following the sun in its circuit round our globe, to find a government that better protects the liberties of its people, and secures to them the blessings we enjoy. (Applause.) I think that one of the evils that beset us is a surfeit of liberty, an exuberance of the priceless blessings for which we are ungrateful. We listened to my honorable friend who addressed you last night (Mr. Toombs) as he recounted the evils of this government. The first was the fishing bounties paid mostly to the sailors of New England. Our friend stated that forty-eight years of our government was under the administration of Southern Presidents. Well, these fishing bounties began under the rule of a Southern President, I believe. No one of them during the whole forty-eight years ever set his administration against the principle or policy of them. It is not for me to say whether it was a wise policy in the beginning; it probably was not, and I have nothing to say in its defence. But the reason given for it was to encourage our young men to go to sea and learn to manage ships. We had at the time but a small navy. It was thought best to encourage a class of our people to become acquainted with seafaring life; to become sailors; to man our naval ships. It requires practice to walk the deck of a ship, to pull the ropes, to furl the sails, to go aloft, to climb the mast; and it was thought by offering this bounty, a nursery might be formed in which young men would become perfected in these arts, and it applied to one section of the country as well as to any other. The result of this was that in the war of 1812, our sailors, many of whom came from this nursery, were equal to any that England brought against us. At any rate, no small part of the glories of that war were gained by the veteran tars of America, and the object of these bounties was to foster that branch of the national defence. My opinion is, that whatever may have been the reason at first, this bounty ought to be discontinued—the reason for it at first no longer exists. A bill for this object did pass the Senate the last Congress I was in, to which my honorable friend contributed greatly, but it was not reached in the House of Representatives.

The next evil that my friend complained of was the tariff. Well, let us look at that for a moment. About the time that I commenced noticing public matters this question was agitating the country almost as fearfully as the slave question now is. In 1832, when I was in college, South Carolina was ready to nullify or secede from the Union on this account. And what have we seen? The tariff no longer distracts the public councils. Reason has triumphed. The present tariff was voted for by Massachusetts and South Carolina. The lion and the lamb lay down together; every man in the Senate and House from Massachusetts and South Carolina, I think, voted for it, as did my honorable friend himself. And if it be true, to use the figure of speech of my honorable friend, that every man in the North who works in iron and brass and wood has his muscle strengthened by the protection of the government, that stimulant was given by his vote and I believe, every other Southern man. So we ought not to complain of that.

Mr. Toombs—The tariff assessed the duties.

Mr. STEPHENS—Yes, and Massachusetts with unanimity voted with the South to lessen them, and they were made just as low as the Southern men asked them to be, and that is the rates they are now at. If reason and argument with experience produced such changes in the sentiments of Massachusetts from 1832 to 1857, on the subject of the tariff, may not like changes be effected there by the same means?—reason and argument and appeals to patriotism on the present vexed question; and who can say that by 1875 or 1890, Massachusetts may not vote with South Carolina and Georgia upon all those questions that now distract the country and threaten its peace and existence? I believe in the power and efficiency of truth—in the omnipotence of truth—and its ultimate triumph when properly wielded. (Applause.) Another matter of grievance alluded to by my honorable friend, was the navigation laws. This policy was also commenced under the administration of one of those Southern Presidents who ruled so well, and has been continued through all of them since. The gentleman's views of the policy of these laws and my own do not disagree. We occupied the same ground in relation to them in Congress. It is not my purpose to defend them now. But it is proper to state some matters connected with their origin. One of the objects was to build up a commercial American marine, by giving American bottoms the exclusive carrying trade between our own ports. This is a great arm of national power. This object was accomplished. We have now an amount of shipping not only coastwise, but to foreign countries which puts us in the front ranks of the nations of the world. England can no longer be styled the mistress of the seas. What American is not proud of the result? Whether those laws should be continued is another question. But one thing is certain, no President, Northern or Southern, has ever yet recommended their repeal. And my friend's efforts to get them repealed was met with but little favor North or South. These, then, were the true main grievances or grounds of complaint against the general system of our government and its workings—I mean the administration of the federal government. As to the acts of several of the States I shall speak presently, but these three were the main ones used against the common head. Now, suppose it be admitted that all of these are evils in the system, do they overbalance and outweigh the advantages and great good which this same government affords in a thousand innumerable ways that cannot be estimated? Have we not at the South as well as the North grown great, prosperous and happy under its operation? Has any part of the world ever shown such rapid progress in the development of wealth, and all the material resources of national power and greatness as the Southern States have under the general government, notwithstanding all its defects?

Mr. TOOMBS—In spite of it.

Mr. STEPHENS—My honorable friend says we have, in spite of the general government, that without it I suppose he thinks we might have done as well or perhaps better than we have done this in spite of it. That may be, and it may not be, but the great fact that we have grown great and powerful under the government as it exists, there is no conjecture or speculation about that; it stands out bold, high and prominent like your Stone Mountain, to which the gentleman alluded in illustrating home facts in his record—this great fact of our unrivalled prosperity in the Union, as it is admitted—whether all this is in spite of the government—whether we of the South would have been better off without the government is to say the least problematical. On the one side we can only put the fact against speculation and conjecture on the other. But even as a question of speculation I differ with my distinguished friend. What we would have lost in border wars without the Union, or what we have gained simply by the peace it has secured, no estimate can be made of. Our foreign trade which is the foundation of all our prosperity has the protection of the navy, which drove the pirates from the waters near our coast, where they had been buccaneering for centuries before, and might have been still had it not been for the American navy under the command of such spirits as Commodore Porter. Now that the coast is clear, that our commerce flows freely outwardly, we cannot well estimate how it would have been under other circumstances. The influence of the government on us is like that of the atmosphere around us. Its benefits are so silent and unseen that they are seldom thought of or appreciated. We seldom think of the single element of oxygen in the air we breathe, and yet let this simple unseen and unfelt agent be withdrawn, this life giving element be taken away from this all-pervading fluid around us, and what instant and appalling changes would take place in all organic creation. It may be that we are all that we are in "spite of the general government," but it may be that without it we should have been far different from what we are now. It is true there is no equal part of the earth with natural resources superior perhaps to ours. That portion of this country known as the Southern States, stretching from the Chesapeake to the Rio Grande, is fully equal to the picture drawn by the honorable and eloquent Senator last night, in all natural capacities. But how many ages and centuries passed before these capacities were developed to reach this advanced stage of civilization? There these same hills, rich in ore, same rivers, same valleys and plains, are as they have been since they came from the hand of the Creator; uneducated and uncivilized man roamed over them for how long no history informs us. It was only under our institutions that they could be developed. Their development is the result of the enterprise of our people under operations of the government and institutions under which we have lived. Even our people without these never would have

done it. The organization of society has much to do with the development of the natural resource of any country or any land. The institutions of a people, political and moral, are the matrix in which the germ of their organic structure quickens into life—takes root and develops in form, nature and character. Our institutions constitute the basis, the matrix, from which spring all our characteristics of development and greatness. Look at Greece. There is the same fertile soil, the same blue sky, the same inlets and harbors, the same Ægean, the same Olympus; there is the same land where Homer sung, where Pericles spoke; it is in nature the same old Greece, but it is living Greece no more. (Applause.) Descendants of the same people inhabit the country; yet what is the reason of this mighty difference? In the midst of present degradation we see the glorious fragments of ancient works of art—temples with ornaments and inscriptions that excite wonder and admiration—the remains of a once high order of civilization which have outlived the language they spoke; upon them all Ichabod has written, their glory has departed. Why is this so? I answer, their institutions have been destroyed. These were but the fruits of their forms of government, the matrix from which their grand development sprung; and when once their institutions have been destroyed, there is no earthly power that can bring back the Promethean spark to kindle them here again, any more than in that ancient land of eloquence, poetry and song. (Applause.) The same may be said of Italy. Where is Rome, once the mistress of the world? There are the same seven hills now, the same soil, the same natural resources; nature is the same, but what a ruin of human greatness meets the eye of the traveler throughout the length and breadth of that most down trodden land! Why have not the people of that Heaven favored clime the spirit that animated their fathers? Why this sad difference? It is the destruction of her institutions that has caused it; and, my countrymen, if we shall in an evil hour rashly pull down and destroy those institutions which the patriotic band of our fathers labored so long and so hard to build up, and which have done so much for us and the world, who can venture the prediction that similar results will not ensue? Let us avoid it if we can. I trust the spirit is amongst us that will enable us to do it. Let us not rashly try the experiment, for if it fails as it did in Greece and Italy and in the South American Republics, and in every other place, wherever liberty is once destroyed it may never be restored to us again. (Applause.) There are defects in our government, errors in administration, and shortcomings of many kinds, but in spite of these defects and errors Georgia has grown to be a great State. Let us pause here a moment. In 1850 there was a great crisis, but not so fearful as this, for of all I have ever passed through, this is the most perilous and requires to be met with the greatest calmness and deliberation. There were many amongst us in 1850 zealous to go at once out of the Union, to disrupt every tie that binds us together. Now, do you believe had that policy been carried out at that time we would have been the same great people that we are to-day? It may be that we would, but have you any assurance of the fact? Would you have made the same advancement, improvement and prosperity that we have? I notice in the Comptroller General's report that the taxable property of Georgia is \$670,000,000 and upwards, an amount not far from double that it was in 1850. I think I may venture to say that for the last ten years the material wealth of the people of Georgia has been nearly if not quite, doubled. The same may be said of our advance in education, and everything that marks our civilization. Have we any assurance that had we regarded the earnest but misguided patriotic advice, as I think, of some of that day, and disrupted the ties which bind us to the Union, we would have advanced as we have? I think not. Well then, let us be careful now before we attempt anything of this sort. I know that there are friends whose patriotism I do not intend to question, who think this Union a curse, and that we would be better off without it. I do not so think; if we can bring about a correction of these evils which threaten—and I am not without hope that this may yet be done—this appeal to go out, with all the provisions for good that accompany it, I look upon as a great, and I fear, a fatal temptation. When I look around and see our prosperity in everything, agriculture, commerce, art, science and every department of education, physical and mental, as well as moral advancement, and our colleges, I think, in the face of such an exhibition, if we can without the loss of power, or any essential right or interest, remain in the Union, it is our duty to ourselves and to prosperity too—let us not too readily yield to this temptation—do so. Our first parents, the great progenitors of the human race, were not without a like temptation when in the garden of Eden. They were led to believe that their condition would be bettered—that their eyes would be opened—and that they would become as gods. They in an evil hour yielded—instead of becoming gods they only saw their own nakedness. I look upon this country with our institutions as the Eden of the world, the paradise of the universe. It may be that out of it we may become greater and more prosperous, but I am candid and sincere in telling you that I fear if we rashly evince passion and without sufficient cause take that step, that instead of becoming greater or more peaceful, prosperous and happy—instead of becoming gods, we will become demons and at no distant day commence cutting one another's throats. This is my apprehension. Let us, therefore, whatever we do, meet these difficulties, great as they are, like wise and sensible men, and consider them in the light of all the consequences which may attend our action. Let us see first clearly where the path of duty leads, and then we may not fear to tread therein.

I come now to the main question put to me, and on which my counsel has been asked. What I shall say will not be in the spirit of dictation. It will be simply my own judgment for what it is worth. It proceeds from a strong conviction that according to our rights, interests and honor—our present safety and future security can be maintained without yet looking to the last resort, the “ultima ratio regulum.”

Now, then, my recommendation to you would be this. In view of all these questions of difficulty, (“the fugitive slave law and slavery in the territories,”) let a convention of the people of Georgia be called, to which they may be all referred. Let the sovereignty of the people speak. Some think that the election of Mr. Lincoln is cause sufficient to dissolve the Union. Some think those other grievances are sufficient to dissolve the same, and that the Legislature has the power thus to act, and ought thus to act. I have no hesitation in saying that the Legislature is not the proper body to sever our federal relations, if that necessity should arise. An honorable and distinguished gentleman the other night (Mr. T. R. R. Cobb) advised you to take this course—*not to wait to hear from the cross roads and groceries.* I say to you, you have no power so to act. You must refer this question to the people, and you must wait to hear from the men of the cross roads, and even the groceries; for the people in this country, whether at the cross roads or the groceries, whether in cottages or palaces, are all equal, and they are the sovereigns in this country. Sovereignty is not in the Legislature. We, the people, are sovereigns. I am one of them and have a right to be heard, and so has any other citizen of the State. Your legislators, I speak it respectfully, are but our servants. You are the servants of the people, and not their masters. Power resides with the people in this country. The great difference between our country and all others, such as France and England and Ireland, is that here there is popular sovereignty, while their sovereignty is exercised by kings and favored classes. This principle of popular sovereignty, however much derided lately, is the foundation of our institutions. Constitutions are but the channels through which the popular will may be expressed. Our constitution came from the people. They made it, and they alone can rightfully unmake it.

Mr. TOOMBS—I am afraid of conventions.

Mr. STEPHENS—I am not afraid of any convention legally chosen by the people. I know no way to decide great questions affecting fundamental laws except by representatives of the people. The constitution of the United States was made by the representatives of the people. The constitution of the State of Georgia was made by representatives of the people, chosen at the ballot box. But do not let the question which comes before the people be put to them in the language of my honorable friend who addressed you last night. Will you submit to abolition rule or resist?

Mr. TOOMBS—I do not wish the people to be cheated.

Mr. STEPHENS—Now, my friends, how are we going to cheat the people by calling on them to elect delegates to a convention to decide all these questions without any dictation or direction? Who proposes to cheat the people by letting them speak their own untrammelled views in the choice of their ablest, and best men, to determine upon all these matters involving their peace. I think the proposition of my honorable friend had a considerable smack of unfairness, not to say cheat. He wished to have no convention, but for the Legislature to submit their vote to the people, submission to abolition rule or resistance? Now who, in Georgia, would vote “submission to abolition rule?” (Laughter.) Is putting such a question to the people to vote on a fair way of getting an expression of the popular will on all these questions? I think not. Now who in Georgia is going to submit to abolition rule?

Mr. TOOMBS—The Convention will.

Mr. STEPHENS—No, my friend, Georgia will never do it. The Convention will never secede from the Georgia platform. Under that there can be no abolition rule in the general government. I am not afraid to trust the people in convention upon this and all questions. Besides, the Legislature were not elected for such a purpose. They came here to do their duty as legislators. They have sworn to support the constitution of the United States. They did not come here to disrupt this government. I am, therefore, for submitting all these questions to a convention of the people. Submit the question to the people, whether they would submit to abolition rule or resist, and then let the Legislature act upon that vote? Such a course would be an insult to the people. They would have to eat their platform, ignore their past history, blot out their records, and take steps backwards, if they should do this. I have never eaten my record or words, and never will. But how will it be under this arrangement if they should vote to resist, and the Legislature should reassemble with this vote as their instructions? Can any man tell what sort of resistance will be meant. One man would say secede; another pass retaliatory measures—these are measures of resistance against wrong—legitimate and right—and there would be as many different ideas as there are members on this floor. Resistance don't mean secession—that in no proper sense of the term is resistance. Believing that the times require action, I am for presenting the question fairly to the people, for calling together an untrammelled Convention, and presenting all the questions to them, whether they will go out of the Union, or what course of resistance in the Union they may think best, and then let the Legislature act when the people in their majesty are heard; and I tell you now, whatever that Convention does I hope and trust our people will abide by. I advise the calling of a Convention with the earnest

desire to preserve the peace and harmony of the State. I should dislike above all things to see violent measures adopted or a disposition to take the sword in hand, by individuals without the authority of law. My honorable friend said last night, "I ask you to give me the sword, for if you do not give it to me, as God lives, I will take it myself."

Mr. TOOMBS—I will. (Applause on the other side.)

Mr. STEPHENS—I have no doubt that my honorable friend feels as he says. It is only his excessive ardor that makes him use such an expression; but this will pass off with the excitement of the hour. When the people in their majesty shall speak, I have no doubt he will bow to their will, whatever it may be, upon the "sober second thought." (Applause.) The greatest curse that can befall a free people is civil war. But as I said, let us call a Convention of the people.

Let all these matters be submitted to it, and when the will of a majority of the people has thus been expressed, the whole State will present one unanimous voice in favor of whatever may be demanded; for I believe in the power of the people to govern themselves, when wisdom prevails and passion is silent. Look at what has already been done by them for their advancement in all that ennobles man. There is nothing like it in the history of the world. Look abroad from one extent of the country to the other, contemplate our greatness. We are now among the first nations of the earth. Shall it be said, then, that our institutions, founded upon the principles of self-government, are a failure? Thus far it is a noble example, worthy of imitation. The gentleman (Mr. Cobb) the other night said it had proved a failure. A failure in what? In growth? Look at our expanse in national power. Look at our population and increase in all that makes a people great. A failure! Why we are the admiration of the civilized world, and present the brightest hopes of mankind. Some of our public men have failed in their aspirations; that is true, and from that comes a great part of our troubles. (Prolonged applause.) No, there is no failure of this government yet. We have made great advancement under the constitution, and I cannot but hope that we shall advance higher still. Let us be true to our trust. Now when this Convention assembles, if it shall be called, as I hope it may, I would say in my judgment, without dictation, for I am conferring with you freely and frankly, and it is thus that I give my views, it should take into consideration all those questions which distract the public mind; should view all the grounds of secession so far as the election of Mr. Lincoln is concerned, and I have no doubt they would say that the constitutional election of no man is a sufficient cause to break up the Union. \* \* \* \* \*

[The peroration of Mr. Stephens' speech has not been reported. We may supply its place by the noble (and prophetic) close of a speech delivered by him in the House of Representatives of the U. S., Feb'y 12, 1847.]

"Mr. Chairman, it was asked by him who spake as never man spake, "what shall a man be profited if he gain the whole world and lose his own soul?" And may I not, with reverence, ask what we shall be profited as a nation, if we gain any part, or, even the whole of Mexico and lose the Union, the soul of our political existence? The Union is not only the life but the soul of these States. It is this that gives them animation, vigor, power, prosperity, greatness and renown; and from this alone spring our hopes of immortality as a common people."